Female Buffalo Soldier- With Documents

Cathay Williams or William Cathay (Cathey)
Private, Thirty-eighth U.S. Infantry 1866-1868
An Exceptional Woman

Cathay Williams in Cowboy Poetry

Cathay Williams

In a tiny shotgun cabin
Martha's baby girl was born.
A baby born to slavery
That no one could forewarn.

Cathay Williams was determined
And never was deterred
As she began her life as a house girl
Being seen but never heard.

Then the Civil War broke out
And the Union soldiers came
And taking Cathay with them
Her life would never be the same.

Cathay learned the ways of military life
And became an accomplished cook.
She was sent to General Sheridan
A job she proudly undertook.

Then the Civil War was ended
And Cathay was finally free

And in seeking out her freedom,
She found her place in history.

Her own way she needed to make
And a burden to no one be
So as a Buffalo Soldier she joined up
In the 38th U. S. Infantry.

Cathay Williams became William Cathay
And no one was to know
The secret of her identity
As a soldier she did grow.

The troops moved west to Ft. Cummings
To keep the Apache at bay.
There were one hundred and one enlisted men
And among them was William Cathay.

After two years as a soldier
In the 38th Company A
William went to see the doctor
And her secret came out that day

Discharged as a Buffalo Soldier
Cathay did her very best
As she continued to make her way
In this land they called the West.

Because of her illegal enlistment
Her pension passed her by
But she picked herself up and moved on
And never questioned why.

Life ended for Cathay Williams
At the age of eighty-two
She lived a long independent life
A life that was tried but true.

A salute to Cathay Williams
The hero of this rhyme
A special woman of the west
A legend in her time.

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The Daughter of the Regiment:
A Brief History of *Vivandieres* and *Cantinieres* in the American Civil War

By Susan Lyons Hughes

*** above image patriotic envelope depicting a vivandiere, collection of the author.**

Vivandieres, sometimes known also as *cantinieres*, were interesting military figures with a fascinating history. By whatever name they were called, women who followed the army in a quasi-military capacity have intrigued observers and attracted the notice of writers for decades. The ideal was an attractive young woman - perhaps the daughter of an officer or wife of a non-commissioned officer - wearing an attractive costume and braving the vicissitudes of battle to provide care for a wounded soldier on the battlefield. The reality was perhaps a bit less romantic; however *vivandieres* have an interesting history. *** Image at right is patriotic envelope depicting a vivandiere. This envelope was cancelled at Cumberland Gap, Tennessee in June 1862, collection of the author.**

The French Connection

Vivandieres first appeared under that name in French armies during the Napoleanic period. The army, intent upon reducing the number of camp followers and hangers-on, restricted the number of women following the army. However, in attempt to provide some of the same services to the soldiers, the army regularized and militarized the presence of a few women to serve as *cantinieres* or *vivandieres*. Army commanders were authorized to appoint one *vivandiere* or *cantiniere* per regiment.[1]

In French army practice, the functions of *vivandiere* and *cantiniere* were somewhat different. *Vivandieres* were mainly confined to garrison camps or posts, and served as a kind of post sutler, selling food and drink to the troops. *Cantinieres* followed their regiments on campaign and in parade, providing food and drink, and often performing the job of nursing ill or wounded soldiers. In 1854, the name *vivandiere* officially replaced the term *cantiniere* in the French army.[2] *Vivandieres* of the Napoleonic armies wore no established uniform, but were distinguished by a cask containing spirits. Some army commanders took the initiative to authorize uniforms for *vivandieres*, and in many cases these were similar to the uniforms of the field music of the regiment, with the addition of a skirt worn over trousers, and, often, a white apron. Illustrations of some of these uniforms can be seen in a number of sources.[3]

Until the Franco-Prussian War of 1871-72, Napoleonic tactics, uniforms, and practices were the model by which all other western countries patterned their own armies, and the influence of French military practices was clearly apparent in the army of the United States throughout the first half of the 19th century. The Crimean War of 1856-58 only strengthened the appeal of the French military. In part this was because the Crimean War was the first war to be photographed and widely reported in newspapers. In addition, American military leaders were sent to the Crimea to observe the British and French armies in action. Three years later, when civil war broke out in the United States, the lessons of the Crimea - and those of the French army - were still on the minds of military leaders, including General George B. McClellan, who had been an observer in the Crimea.

The most obvious "transplants" of French military practice that took root in the United States during the American Civil War were the volunteer regiments which adopted the name and uniform styles of the French "Zouave" and "Chausseur" regiments. Wearing brightly decorated uniforms that selectively and sometimes creatively borrowed elements of their French antecedents, Zouave regiments were formed in both Union and Confederate armies. Another instance of French influence in American regiments was the adoption of a woman who served as a *vivandiere* or *cantiniere*. In American military practice the names *vivandiere* and *cantiniere* came to be used interchangeably, and many women who fulfilled this function came also to be known as "the daughter of the regiment."

The uniforms worn by *vivandieres* and *cantinieres* changed along with fashions of the day. The popular silhouette of the Napoleonic period, a high waistline and narrow skirts, was reflected in the costumes adopted by *vivandieres* in the same period. By the mid-19th century, waistlines had

dropped to a natural level, and skirts were held away from the body in much the same manner that fashionable crinolines supported the skirts of fashionable women. *** Image at left is color lithograph of French cantiniere, circa 1855, collection of the author.**

The earliest recorded photographs of *vivandieres* date from the Crimean War,[4] and it is probable that images from that war were responsible for popularizing many of the French-inspired uniforms and customs including Zouave and Chausseur uniforms and *vivandieres* in the United States at the time of the American Civil War.

Vivandieres remained an established part of French armies until after the Franco-Prussian War in 1871-1872. It is notable that after the defeat of the French in the Franco-Prussian War, the United States Army adopted uniforms and practices much more in line with those of the Prussian Army - the victors - and abandoned the French-style uniforms of the Civil War period.

Vivandieres in the American Civil War

The dashing image of French soldiers, especially the Zouave regiments, in the Crimean War, captured the imagination of Americans in the 1850s, and, by 1859, several local militia regiments had adopted the name "Zouave," as well as interpretations of the colorful Zouave uniforms. Some of these local groups sported a *vivandiere* in their ranks.[5] At the outbreak of the American Civil War, most regiments were organized as independent companies of troops, raised in a local area. Some of these companies selected their own uniforms and accoutrements without regard to regular army practice. And some of these regiments also selected a local lady to serve as "the daughter of the regiment," the American equivalent to the French *vivandiere*. The 49th Ohio, organized at Camp Dennison, Ohio in 1861, was one such regiment:

At four o'clock on Monday evening, a dress parade was held, and Miss Ella Gibson, the daughter of Colonel Gibson was chosen Daughter of the Regiment. Captain Hays presented the young Miss to the soldiers and Col. Blackman on behalf of the regiment adopted her as its daughter. Col. Gibson was then called out and made speech of some length.[6]

Calculating the exact number of women who served in this capacity is difficult, if not impossible. Because the presence of *vivandieres* was not sanctioned by the military establishment of either army, women who served as *vivandieres* are rarely mentioned in official records. Only in regimental histories, post-war records and personal accounts do their names and identities emerge. In any case, the total number of women who served in this capacity is quite small.

One documented image of a Confederate *vivandiere* is in an image of Coppens' Louisiana Zouaves taken in May 1861. The lady pictured wears a uniform that consists of full Zouave trousers, a short but full skirt, short jacket, plumed hat, and apron.[7] Another Southerner, Lucy Ann Cox, served as the daughter of the regiment with the 13th Virginia through the surrender at Appomatox. A monument to Cox was dedicated in 1894 in Fredericksburg, Virginia.[8]

There is more documentation of *vivandieres* serving with Union regiments, although many remain anonymous. Naturally, many served with Zouave regiments, the 114th Pennsylvania, for example. The 39th New York, also known as the Garibaldi Guard, a popular New York

regiment, left for war with six *vivandieres*. Some of the most well known *vivandieres* were Marie Tepe of Collis' Zouaves, Kady Brownell of the 1st (later 5th) Rhode Island, Bridget Divers of the 1st Michigan Cavalry, and Annie Etheridge of the 3rd and 5th Michigan. The exploits of these women were recorded shortly after the Civil War by Frank Moore in *Women in the War*, by L.P. Brockett and Mary Vaughn in *Women's Work During the War*, and by others. These glowing post-war accounts are filled with romantic language describing the noble deeds of these women which have been well-described in other sources. Despite the over-blown language of the immediate post-war accounts, however, the fact remains that the self-sacrifice and courage of these women saved lives and provided care to soldiers who might otherwise have had none.[9] As one example alone, Tepe and Etheridge were both awarded the Kearny Cross after the Battle of Chancellorsville.[10]

The career of Marie Tepe (or Tebe, in some sources), has long fascinated writers. "French Mary," as she was styled, served in the capacity of a *vivandiere* with Collis' Zoaves, the 114th Pennsylvania, receiving an ankle wound at Fredericksburg and being awarded the Kearny Cross after Chancellorsville. Tepe participated in many GAR activities and post-war regimental reunions after the war, proudly sporting the Kearney Cross on her uniform. Her injury continued to plague Tepe, and she apparently committed suicide by taking arsenic in 1901.[11] *** photo at right is Kady Brownell of the 1st (later 5th) Rhode Island, as depicted in Frank C. Moore, Women of the War, 1866.**

Uniforms of Civil War *Vivandieres*

Uniforms of *vivandieres* in the American Civil War varied from regiment to regiment. All had in common a knee-length skirt worn over full trousers, a tunic or jacket, hat, and some military trim or designation. This style of costume was very similar to bathing and gymnastic costumes depicted in fashion magazines of the period, and was suitable for the outside exercise required of *vivandieres* who lived and marched with their regiments. There was probably a great deal of variation in trim and materials in the costume of *vivandieres* because there was no standardization of uniform for this non-official post. Sarah Taylor, the daughter of the First Tennessee (United States Volunteers) joined her stepfather's regiment at Camp Dick Robinson, Kentucky in 1861. When the regiment marched away from Camp Dick Robinson toward Camp Wildcat in September of that year, a reporter for the Cincinnati *Times* described her thus:

She has donned a neat blue chapeau, beneath which her long hair is fantastically arranged; bearing at her side a highly-finished regulation sword, and silver-mounted pistols in her belt, all of which gives her a very neat appearance…. She wore a blue blouse, and was armed with pistols, sword and rifle.[12]

Eliza Wilson of the 5th Wisconsin appeared in a soldier's letter wearing:

… clothes of such pattern as the military (not millinery) board have ordered for nurses in the army, which is the Turkish costume….The color is bright brown; no crinoline; dress reaches half way between the knee and ankle; upper sleeve loose, gathered at the wrist; pantalettes same color, wide but gathered tight around the ankle; black hat with plumes or feathers of same color; feet dressed in morocco boots.[13]

The *vivandieres* of the Garibaldi Guard were described as wearing "feathered hats, jaunty red jackets and blue gowns."[14]

The Role of *Vivandieres* in the American Civil War

Though non-essential to fighting regiments, *vivandieres* performed some important functions. The most important was as a nurse. With her cask of spirits or a canteen of water, a *vivandiere* gave a wounded or sick soldier immediate attention, comparable to a modern triage situation. Some *vivandieres* were well-armed for self-defense, such as Sarah Taylor, who carried a sword, rifle and pistols. Annie Etheridge carried two pistols, and Marie Tepe was also armed with a pistol. Among the deeds of valor performed by *vivandieres* were Kady Brownell's actions at the battle of New Bern, where, carrying the colors into battle, Kady ran with the flag to the center of the field to show the Union troops that the 5th Rhode Island was not the enemy.[15]

Often the *vivandiere* was the wife of a soldier or the daughter of an officer, and the "daughter of the regiment" commanded the respect of soldiers in ways that other types of camp followers could not. A soldier in the 5th Wisconsin wrote of Eliza Wilson:

We have not seen a woman for a fortnight with the exception of the Daughter of the Regiment, who is with us in storm and sunshine. It would do you good to see her trudging along, with or after the regiment, her dark brown frock buttoned tightly around her waist, her what-you-call-ems tucked into her well fitting gaiters, her hat and feather set jauntily on one side, her step firm and assured, for she knows that every arm in our ranks would protect her. Never pouting or passionate, with a kind word for every one, and every one a kind word for her.[16]

Sarah Taylor was captured and paroled sometime after leaving Camp Dick Robinson, and appeared in this article in the Memphis *Daily Appeal* on July 18, 1863:

Sallie Taylor, "La Fille due Regiment." This notorious (beautiful, though she was) woman arrested, as our readers will remember, some months ago, and discharged upon her parole, has kept herself quiet recently, when, as we are informed, she so far captivated, if not captured, a private in Cobb's battery stationed at Clinton, as to induce him to steal the horse of one of the lieutenants of his company and to escape with her into Kentucky, where she may resume *in propria personnae* her *nom de plume* of "Daughter of the 1st (Bird's) Tennessee regiment." – Knoxville Register.[17]

Not all of those who wore the uniform of *vivandieres* were respectable, however. According to Kenneth Olsen, author of *Music and Muskets*:

Not all *vivandiere*[s] were as pure in heart as the fair Marie. The unofficial ministrations of a *vivandiere* attached to a New York regiment eventually got the generous lady into trouble. She was given the option of leaving the area quietly or being drummed from the camp. She elected the easy way out.[18]

Vivandieres seem to have been a more common sight during the first two years of the war, when fighting was sporadic and the armies spent much time in camps. As the war progressed and campaigns covered longer distances, there is less evidence of *vivandieres* remaining with

the army. Alfred Bellard drew a picture and described a *vivandiere*, who may have been Marie Tepe, whom he saw in a hospital near Chancellorsville, in May, 1863.[19] In September 1864, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered that all women be removed from military camps in his theatre. In the wake of this order, Annie Etheridge was forced to confine her activities to the hospital at City Point, Virginia, despite the endorsements of numerous officers, including the corps commander of the Second Corps. She returned at some point, however, because she was with the 5th Michigan when it mustered out in July 1865.[20]

Myths and Misconceptions about *vivandieres*

In the last few years, several sources have been written about *vivandieres* during the Civil War containing a number of myths and anecdotal stories of *vivandieres*, which have not been adequately documented. Among these misconceptions is the tendency to equate *vivandieres* with women who served in the army disguised as soldiers. Nothing could be further from the truth. *Vivandieres* or *cantinieres* made no effort to disguise their sex; nor were they "enlisted" as soldiers in their respective regiments. They were clearly and quite obviously women who adopted an obviously feminine role within a military organization.

A number of women in official or quasi-official capacities with the army adopted costumes similar to that of *vivandieres*; yet their function was not that of the *vivandiere*. Dr. Mary Walker, Loretta Valesquez, Madame Turchin, and others wore "uniforms" similar to that of *vivandieres*, with short skirts worn over trousers; however, these individuals performed different functions and cannot be classed as *vivandieres* in the strict sense of the term. Others, such as Belle Reynolds, were officially recognized as "daughters of the regiment" in recognition of their services to soldiers in the regiments commanded by their husbands, although their primary assistance was rendered after battles in hospitals.

Finally, the recent fascination with *vivandieres* has prompted a number of publications and commentaries which have incorrectly cited "the regulations of 1865" as proof that *vivandieres* were established military functionaries in the United States Army. The United States Army did not publish a set of regulations in 1865, and *vivandieres* were never given an established post in American armies. The regulations to which these sources refer were published in 1865 by the French army, and, according to an article in *Uniformes Les Armees de L'Histoire* by Luce Ries (translated by Nicholas Powell):

In 1860 they [French *vivandieres*] were assimilated with the rest of the troops as regards decorations and pay. They also took part in marches and parades. A regulation of 1865 fixed their number at:

1 per infantry battalion (2 after 1869)
2 per light infantry battalion (3 after 1869)
2 per cavalry squadron;
4 per artillery or engineers regiment.

The number of canteen women in the Imperial Guard was higher. Grenadiers and voltiguers regiments had 20 each.[21]

Scholars studying the introduction of females into the military traditions of the United States Army would do well to consult original sources rather than the questionable regurgitation of myths which surround the history of *vivandieres* in the Civil War. *** image at left is carte de visite of of the American actress Lotta Crabtree as Firefly (from the play The Firefly) circa 1860-1870, collection of the author.**

Conclusion

The number of women who served as *vivandieres* in the American Civil War is quite small, however, the romantic image of the *vivandiere* or *cantiniere*, in dashing uniform marching at the head of a column of adoring soldiers, remains a popular and intriguing subject for both historians and Civil War buffs. The presence of *vivandieres* in the armies of both sides during the American Civil War demonstrates the strength of the desire on the part of some women to have a more active role in the military. The presence of *vivandieres* in volunteer regiments of the Civil War did not change established practice in the United States Army; nevertheless, their presence provided an early hint that women could be useful in a military environment.

NOTES:

[1] Preben Kannik, *Military Uniforms of the World* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 189-90.

[2] Luce Ries, "*Les Cantinieres: ou les 'dessous' de la gloire,*" *Uniformes Les Armees de L'histoire* 67 (May-June, 1982), 7 (translated by Nicholas Powell).

[3] Kannik, 189-190, plate 203, illustration of a *cantiniere* of the 15th Light Infantry, 1809; Kannik, 212, plate 308, illustration of a *cantiniere* of the Infantry of the Line in 1854. Kannik notes that "During the Second Empire period, the French *cantinieres*, usually married to N.C.O.s, were dressed in quite becoming garments, although these were worn over trousers and gaiters. The feminine aspect was stressed by bonnets, lace-trimmed collars and skirts of crinoline type. Instead of the large straw hat, made fashionable by the Empress Eugenie, a lighter version of the regimental headgear was worn."; Philip Haythornthwaite, *Napoleon's Light Infantry* (London: Osprey *Men-At-Arms* Series, 1983, 34, plate 2); Michael McAfee, *Zouaves: The First and the Bravest* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1991), 17,67.

[4] Elizabeth Ewing, *Women in Uniform: Their Costume through the Centuries*, (London, B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1975), 31.

[5] Michael J. McAfee, *Zouaves: The First and the Bravest* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1991), 25-26, 39.

[6] The Seneca (Ohio) *Advertiser*, September, 1861, as it appeared in an article in the "Camp Noble Gallant," newsletter of the 49th Ohio Infantry reenactment group, Todd Miller, editor, September, 1991.

[7] Ross Brooks, "Red Petticoats and Blue Jackets: 1st Confederate States Zouave Battalion or Coppens' Louisiana Zouaves," *Military Collector and Historian* Vol. XLV, No. 4 (Winter, 1993); James Hennessey, "The *Vivandiere* of the Louisiana Zouave Battalion," *Journal, Confederate Historical Society of Great Britain* Vol. 17, No. 1

(Spring 1989), 2-3. This same image was apparently mis-identified as being of Wheat's Louisiana Tigers in William C. Davis, *The Image of War 1861-1865*, Vol. 1, p. 191.

[8] Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Bonnet Brigades* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf), 1966; Elizabeth D. Leonard, *All the Daring of a Soldier* (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 146.

[9] Moore, Frank, *Women of the War* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton, & Co., 1866), 51, 747; Brockett, L.P. and Mary C. Vaughn, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy & Co., 1867).

[10] Department of War, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* Series I., Vol. 51, part 1. Brig. Gen. D.B. Birney, General Order #48 (May 16, 1863).

[11] Lawrence G. Bixley, "Gettysburg Mystery Photo: A Second Look," *Military Images* (July-August, 1982), 24-25; William Gladstone, "Gettysburg Mystery Photo … more answers," *Military Images* (March-April 1982), 16-18; "She Feared Not War….," *Military Images* (March-April 1982), 19; Marie Varrelman Melchiori, "The Death of 'French Mary'," *Military Images* (July-August 1983), 14-15; Michael J. McAfee, "114th Pennsylvania Infantry: 'The Collis Zouaves'," *Military Images* (July-August 1991), 29; Robin Smith and Bill Younghusband, *American Civil War Zouaves* (London: Osprey *Elite* series, 1996), 53-55, plate L2.

[12] *The Picket Line and Camp Fire Stories* (NY: Hurst & Co., n.d.), 95-96.

[13] Ethel Alice Hurn, *Wisconsin Women in the War Between the States* (Madison: Wisconsin History Commission, 1911), 100-101.

[14] Robin Smith and Bill Younghusband, *American Civil War Zouaves* (London: Osprey *Elite* series, 1996), 61, plate I2; James Hennessey and H. Michael Madaus, "72nd Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1864, '3rd California Regiment,' 'Baxter's Fire Zouaves'," *Military Uniforms in America*, 75, Plate 495.

[15] Moore, Frank, *Women of the War* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton, & Co., 1866), 51.

[16] Hurn, 100-101.

[17] Memphis *Daily Appeal* (July 18, 1863), p. 1, c. 6.

[18] Kenneth Olsen, *Music and Musket: Bands and Bandsmen of the American Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 211.

[19] David H. Donald, ed., *Gone for a Soldier: The Civil War Memoirs of Private Alfred Bellard* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1975), 219-220.

[20] Leonard, 111-13.

[21] Luce Ries, 7.

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Illustrations

Image of *vivandiere* on ceramic plate in my collection
2 patriotic envelopes depicting *vivandieres* in my collection
Photocopy of *vivandiere* in my collection
Image of Kady Brownell from *Women in the War* (copyright free)
Image of Marie Tepe from Library of Congress
Coppens' Zouaves *vivandiere* from LoC

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Vivandieres have an interesting role in the American Civil War. These brave women traveled with soldiers as mascots or nurses; there are even cases where they fought alongside their male counterparts. A vivandiere could provide creature comforts to the soldiers. Officially during the Civil War, the term Vivandiere is usually applied only to women who served with Zouaves. The term “Vivandiere”, is derived from a mixture of French and Latin, which literally means “hospitality”.

A sketch by Thur de Thulstrup of the 5th New York Infantry drilling atop Federal Hill, Baltimore, in 1862.

A corporal in the 5th New York Infantry at Federal Hill, Baltimore, 1862. Photo courtesy of Richard Tibbals